

READINESS SUBCOMMITTEE

Chairman Garamendi's Opening Statement

Briefing on the Findings and Recommendations of the National Commission on Military Aviation Safety

Today's unclassified subcommittee briefing is on the findings and recommendations of the National Commission on Military Aviation Safety. As a reminder, this Commission was established at the direction of this committee through the FY2019 National Defense Authorization Act after seeing concerning trends in the number and frequency of aviation mishaps, especially in the Navy and Marine Corps communities.

As noted in the Commission's report, more than 6,000 aviation mishaps occurred, claiming 198 lives, destroying 157 aircraft, and causing more than \$9.4 billion in damage over the 2013-2018 timeframe the commission was asked to review. Furthermore, an additional 29 aircraft were destroyed, 26 lives lost, and \$2.25 billion in damage resulted from aviation mishaps that occurred while the commission conducted its work in 2019 and 2020. These lives and aircraft were not lost in combat. These were mishaps that occurred at home and abroad during routine training flights and day-to-day operations.

There is no question that military flight operations are inherently risky, but the rate of aviation mishaps and trends we have seen is alarming. We spend much time scrutinizing the decisions of individual pilots or squadron-level leadership, and that makes sense since that is where the rubber meets the road. However, what is often missing from the discussion is an analysis of institutional decisions that also contribute to these mishaps. Poor resourcing, resource imbalances, manpower and experience reductions, high operational

tempo – these institutional decisions are readiness degraders. They drive up risk and transfer it to the squadron-level of command. Moreover, reduced readiness creates an environment where maintainers feel pressured to cut corners to get aircraft back on a flight schedule; where low-currency pilots feel pressured to take an unserviceable aircraft flying; where squadron commanders make poor risk decisions in an effort get readiness back up to an acceptable level. While we can and should hold squadron-level personnel accountable for poor risk decisions that lead to mishaps, we must also identify and correct the poor resourcing and leadership decisions made at higher levels of command. So to that end, I hope that we will discuss these challenges during today's briefing.

This commission, made up of military and commercial aviation experts, was charged with studying the issue and to make recommendations to improve military aviation safety and, hopefully, reduce the number and rate of mishaps. Today, we meet to hear the commission's findings and recommendations developed over their two-year effort that included a review of recent military aviation mishaps, meetings with military personnel on the flight lines, and engagements with commercial and civilian aviation partners. It is my hope that the commission's work will not only inform

I'd like to conclude by thanking General Cody, Mr. Healing, and the other members and staff of the Commission for their work over the past two years. It is my hope that the commission's work will not only inform this subcommittee's oversight going forward. With the information learned today, we intend to follow up with the Department of Defense to understand their thoughts on the Commission's report and, more importantly, what specific actions they intend to take to improve military aviation safety.

With that, I'll turn it over to Mr. Lamborn for any opening comments he may wish to make.

[Ranking Member Lamborn Comments]

Thank you Mr. Lamborn. Today we will be hearing from:

General Richard A. Cody (U.S. Army, Retired)

Chairman

National Commission on Military Aviation Safety

The Honorable Richard F. Healing

Vice Chairman

National Commission on Military Aviation Safety

Electronic copies of the briefers' prepared statements, as well as copies of the Commission's final report have been distributed to Member offices in advance of today's meeting. After the presentation, we will open it up to questions. Committee staff have a list of Members who have already indicated they have questions. If you would like to get on the question list, please make it know to the committee staff in the chat function in the Teams app or by having your staff contact the committee.

With that, General Cody, the time is yours.